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## PROVENÇAL POETRY.

*Frederi Mistral*, der Dichter der Provence.  
VON NICOLAUS WELTER. Mit Mistral's  
Bildnis. Marburg: N. G. Elwertsche Ver-  
lagsbuchhandlung, 1899. 8vo, 356 pp.

UNDOUBTEDLY Mr. Nicolaus Welter has chosen a sublime topic, the treatment of which requires above all a keen sense of the beautiful. We would certainly be wrong in denying him this precious faculty, the lack of which is frequently the reason that simple-minded enthusiastic readers are better judges of the merits of a great living poet than critics famous for their learning and acuteness. Mr. Welter loves his poet, a most natural feeling in regard to the great "empereur du midi," "le roi du soleil," with whom since the publication of *Mireio* all countries and nations sympathize. But Mr. Welter's admiration is not blind, as we shall soon see.

His interesting book, which is full of pleasant detail, is dedicated to August Bertuch, the peerless German translator of *Mireio* and *Nerto*. It is divided into the following twelve chapters: i. Childhood and College Years; ii. The Félibrige; iii. *Mireio*; iv. The Latin Confederation; v. *Calendau*; vi. *Lis isclo d'or*; vii. The *Capoulié*; viii. *Nerto*; ix. *Maiano*; x. *La Réino Tano*; xi. *The Song of the Rhone*; xii. *Epilogue*. The reader is consequently prepared for a most eloquently written biography interspersed with the principal dates which mark the gradually spreading influence of the Félibrige, and in addition skilfully analyzed poems the chronological order of which has been strictly observed. If Mr. Welter expects his public to pick out but one or two chapters at a time in order to spend a pleasant hour over their amusing contents, his arrangement will certainly meet with general approval. But those who will read his book through from beginning to end will be puzzled now and then in case they are not sufficiently versed in the history of the modern Renaissance of Provence, or will make the unpleasant discovery that very fine and touching effects created by the clever writer are checked or even counteracted by his frequently grouping together rather incongruous elements. The chapter on *Maiano*, for instance, is full of all sorts of information on Mistral's later years, his house, the death of

his mother, of dear friends, his trip to Italy, etc. This chapter is placed directly *after Nerto*; and *Queen Tane* and the *Song of the Rhone* when their turn comes, are rather severely criticised. We all know that Mistral was not born to be a dramatist, a statement which needed no further discussion. But his last epic poem deserves a *fair* judgment. Mr. Welter has forgotten to consider that as a rule the last pages of a book count double. Or does he believe that the charming *Epilogue*, the product of his own fancy, will efface the idea of decline which in the case of a long-lived genius is inevitable but on which nobody should dare to insist while the hands of the poet are still full of gifts as rare and ennobling as Mistral's will be to the end? Mr. Welter would, perhaps, have better served his own purpose by briefly stating the exact dates of the poems in a more condensed biography and by rearranging his whole poetical product in a distinct series of chapters which in conformity with his own taste he might have successfully crowned with *Calendau*. For the chief merit of Mr. Welter's book consists in his high-minded appreciation of *Calendau* which he terms a "*goldenen Codex der Ehre, der eine Fülle der kernigsten Grundsätze enthält und durch die Glut und Wucht seiner Sprache besonders empfängliche Jünglingsseelen hinreissen muss*" (p. 164). He excels all other (even the French) critics in climbing to the lofty heights to which Mistral's powerful inspiration has soared during the years of vigorous manhood. This period of Mistral's activity must be kept in front. Placed after *Calendau*, the *Epilogue* would have turned out one grand hymn and might have represented Mistral as the personification of his hero *Calendau*, having achieved like him great deeds, though not only in honor of the fervently beloved native soil but for the sake of the divine art of poetry. Assuming the beautiful shape of "*Esterello*," the genius of poetry crowns Mistral with the laurels of immortality!

Another merit of Mr. Welter's book consists in a selection of beautiful and exact translations of his own (for instance, from *Calendau*, pp. 135-147; from the *Song of the Rhone*, pp. 233-340), for which he may indeed rank with Bertuch. It is a pity that he did not choose to

favor us also with a masterly reproduction of the grand passage in which Estrello vividly protests against the destruction of the forests of Mount Ventour:

*Engendramen de sacrillèg,*

*Dins lou vaste univers, dis, creson tout de siéu ! . . .*

But perhaps he intends to publish later on a *Calendau* in German verse. To judge from the fine specimens here given we may congratulate ourselves on such a brilliant prospect. For Mr. Welter himself is a poet and in relating some picturesque episodes of Mistral's life he reveals an uncommon descriptive power and a marvelous vividness of expression. In recording, for instance, the day on which Mistral crossed Lake Geneva on board the yacht of the Princess of Brancovan (p. 236), he does not write prose but a jubilee in blank verse. A few trifles may meet with contradiction. In mentioning the *Trésor dou Fèlibrige* Mr. Welter compares Mistral's method of collecting the vocabulary and legends of the South chiefly by means of *oral* communication, with the analogous proceedings of *Malherbe's*(?) and *den Brüdern Grimm*. *Malherbe* and the Grimms in one breath! *Malherbe* was not a fit example to quote. His well-known assertion that he would like to take refuge with the *crocheteurs du Port au foin* must not be taken literally. It was but an outburst of his habitual querulous manner of uttering his disgust for Ronsard and the *Pléiade* (p. 241).

Why are we repeatedly told that the sublime poem of *Calendau* is a fit subject for *men*: "für Männerherzen, empfängliche Jünglingsseelen, eine beschränkte Anzahl stolzer und freiheitsfroher Männer?" Women especially are indebted to the great poet for his creating such wonderful types of the "ideal woman;" for Mireio incorporates love faithful unto death, Nerto with her sweet innocent belief in God and pure love delivers frivolous Don Rodrigue from the hold of the hellish fiend, Esterello, as the genius of real love shields *Calendau* from the temptations of base sensuality! Why, I wonder, are women not to be counted among the grateful admirers of *Calendau*?

Every time I peruse an essay or a detailed study on Mistral I sorely miss the scholar's grateful acknowledgment of the fact that the great poet included in the splendid framework

of modern poetry some brilliant gems of ancient French origin: Estrello, for instance, in encouraging her lover, evokes some touching scenes from *Aliscans*, and the *Song of the Rhone* carries with its waves the memory of the ancient blissful time when tender-hearted Nicolette "en coustume de pichot fanfounaire," returned from distant lands to the castle of "Bèu-Caire" where faithful Aucassin pined for her love.

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### GOETHE'S POEMS.

*Goethe's Poems.* Selected and edited with introduction and notes by CHARLES HARRIS, Ph. D. Boston: D. C. Heath & Co., 1899. xvii, 286 pp.

THIS small volume contains six pages of introduction, one hundred and seventy of text, and one hundred and five of notes. The selections are chronological and almost without exception excellent. The notes confine themselves to necessary explanations, and also give the history of the origin of each poem, as far as this is known. There is an air of great carefulness about the notes, about the whole book in fact. Errors in printing have been reduced to a minimum.

While the work is characterized by excellence and is a distinct contribution to our Goethe text-book literature, one does occasionally meet with an idea or a statement in the notes to which one cannot subscribe. The most obvious are the following.

Selection 2 (p. 175). *Profound* is too strong an adjective in the sentence "The three years of his student life at Leipzig were of *profound* influence in Goethe's development."

Again, the same paragraph later on reads: "but the stimulus given him by his associates and the social, intellectual, and artistic life of the city (Leipzig) were impulses to rapid growth, *probably unequalled in his later career.*"

Exception is to be taken to the last statement. The period of Goethe's youth which stands out pre-eminently in point of growth above all others is that of Strassburg. What intellectual stimulus of Leipzig compares for one moment with that gained from contact with Herder?